DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 750 EA 031 602

AUTHOR Denessen, Eddie; Sleegers, Peter; Smit, Frederik
TITLE Reasons for School Choice in The Netherlands and in Finland. Occasional Paper.
INSTITUTION Columbia Univ., New York, NY. National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education.
REPORT NO NCSPE-OP-24
PUB DATE 2001-04-00
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, Washington, April 10-14, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Improvement; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *School Choice; *Social Influences
IDENTIFIERS *Finland; *Netherlands; Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

Current educational reforms encompass increasing freedom of parental choice. Parental choice is seen as a stimulus for school improvement and school quality control. One of the central thoughts behind freedom of parental choice is that the quality of education will increase when the educational system has to act using market mechanisms, in which the principle of "demand and supply" prevails and where competition becomes a major feature of the educational system. This study focused on the relative importance of parents' reasons for school choice, hoping to provide insight into how reasons for school choice are imbedded within cultural contexts. Data were gathered regarding the reasons 244 Dutch and 244 Finnish parents choose schools. Results show that people from both countries emphasize social education as a leading reason for choosing a school and that academic achievement and religious values are seen as least important. It is recommended that research on reasons for school choice should pay more attention to social factors influencing school choice than to issues of academic achievement. (Contains 21 references.) (RT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 462 750

Occasional Paper No. 24

National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education

Teachers College, Columbia University

Reasons for school choice in The Netherlands and in Finland

Eddie Denessen, Peter Sleegers and Frederik Smit

April 2001

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

E. Denessen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract – Current educational reforms encompass increasing freedom of parental choice. As such, parental choice is seen as a stimulus for school improvement and quality control of schools. Giving parents more say in the choice of a school for their child is said to empower them and to enhance the role of market mechanism in the educational system. One of the central thoughts behind freedom of parental choice is that the quality of education will increase when the educational system has to act like a market, in which the principle of 'demand and supply' prevails and where competition becomes a major feature of the educational system. In this study, we will focus on the relative importance of several reasons for school choice of parents. Moreover, we will try to give insight in the way reasons for school choice are imbedded within cultural contexts. We will discuss differences within countries, as well as between countries. For this study, data are gathered regarding reasons for school choice of 244 Dutch and 244 Finnish parents. In this study, it is shown that people from both countries hold an emphasis of schools on social education as a leading reason for choosing a school and that an emphasis on achievements and religious values are seen as the least important reasons for choosing a school. Consequence of the results of this study might be that in marketing schools, more emphasis may be laid on social aspects of education and less, as is currently the case, on academic

* Eddie Denessen and Peter Sleegers are affiliated with Department of Education, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Frederik Smit is affiliated with Institute of Applied Social Sciences, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Contact email: E.Denessen@ped.kun.nl

EA031602

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

achievements. In conclusion, we state that research on reasons for school choice should pay more attention to social factors influencing school choice than to issues of academic achievements.

© 2001 Eddie Denessen, Peter Sleegers & Frederik Smit. This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 11, 2001, Seattle, Washington. Invited symposium on *Choice, Effectiveness, and Equality in Education. Public and Private Schooling in the Netherlands Compared to Other European Societies.*

The Occasional Paper Series of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education (NCSPE) is designed to promote dialogue about the many facets of privatization in education. The subject matter of the papers is diverse, including research reviews and original research on vouchers, charter schools, home schooling, and educational management organizations. The papers are grounded in a range of disciplinary and methodological approaches. The views presented in these papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the NCSPE.

If you are interested in submitting a paper, or wish to learn more about the NCSPE, please contact us at:

NCSPE
Box 181
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 W. 120th Street
New York, NY 10027

(212) 678-3259 (telephone)
(212) 678-3474 (fax)
ncspe@columbia.edu
www.tc.columbia.edu/ncspe

Current educational reforms encompass increasing freedom of parental choice. As such, parental choice is seen as a stimulus for school improvement and quality control of schools. Giving parents more say in the choice of a school for their child is said to empower them and to enhance the role of market mechanism in the educational system (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Woods, Bagley & Glatter, 1998). One of the central thoughts behind freedom of parental choice is that the quality of education will increase when the educational system has to act like a market, in which the principle of 'demand and supply' prevails and where competition becomes a major feature of the educational system (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Woods, Bagley & Glatter, 1998).

Behind this central thought the assumption lies that parents will choose a school for its high learning outcomes (Woods et al., 1998). This assumption, however, will not necessarily be true, as can be illustrated by findings of research on reasons for school choice conducted by Echols and Wilms (1995; p. 22): 'We thought issues of academic quality would dominate reasons for rejecting and choosing a school. This was generally not the case ... social/ reputational reasons and disciplinary climate were the dominant themes for both the reasons of rejection and the reasons for selection'.

This suggests that the level of academic performance is not a leading reason for choosing a school. As Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (1994, p. 95) put it: '... although choice of schools is important for parents, this does not mean that all parents want the same thing from schools. Nor does it mean that parents will choose schools purely on the basis of their academic performance – a fundamental assumption of the current reforms. In fact, the parents in our study appeared to place much more emphasis on social and emotional factors than on academic ones.'

Although some research on reasons for school choice has been conducted, more insight is needed in parents' reasons for choosing a school and factors that may influence parents' reasons. This paper, therefore, focuses on the relative importance of parents' reasons for school choice. We

will discuss several reasons for school choice, which are known to be of importance for school choice. Furthermore, we will discuss the issue of class-related reasons for school choice, since research has shown that parents from different classes tend to differ with respect to the choice of a school for their child.

The issue of class-related reasons for school choice is an important topic in education policy debates regarding promoting or restricting freedom of choice, since class-related school choice could enhance segregation between schools (Goldhaber, 1997; Kartsen, 1994; Simola, Rinne, & Kivirauma, 1999).

Reasons for school choice

On the basis of previous research that has been done on reasons for school choice, several reasons can be distinguished as being of importance for choosing a school (Echols & Wilms, 1993; Hammond & Dennison, 1995; Hughes, Wikeley, & Nash, 1994; Hunter, 1991; Morgan, Dunn, Cairns, & Fraser, 1993).

In their research on parental choice, Hughes et al. (1994) found locality (mentioned by 56 percent of a sample of 138 parents), and reputation (mentioned by 46 percent of the parents) as the two leading reasons for choosing a school. Locality refers to issues of convenience, but also to the extent to which a school is seen as part of a local community. Reputation refers to issues of care for children and the quality of education (Hughes et al., 1994). For her research on school choice, Hunter (1991) interviewed 300 parents. These parents stated that discipline, good exam results, and proximity to home were the most important reasons for choosing a school. Of less importance were denomination of the school, caring teachers, and special emphasis on the practical area of curriculum. In another research on reasons for school choice, Echols and Wilms (1993) investigated reasons of 290 parents who had chosen a non-local school for their child. They found that the preferences of their child, a well-disciplined school climate, and good behavior of students were important reasons. Morgan et al. (1993) found that the quality of education and the geographical

nearness of the school were important reasons for choosing a school. Hammond and Dennison (1995) after having interviewed 725 parents, found that teacher quality, examination results, discipline, and school reputation were the most important reasons for choosing a school.

In all, a broad distinction in three categories can be made between reasons for school choice. First, parents can possess ideological reasons for choosing a school. These ideological reasons comprise the religious identity of the school and the pedagogical views that underlie school's education. Second, the geographical distance might be of importance for choosing a school. Third, issues of the content and the goals of education can be held as reasons for school choice.

Especially with regard to this last category of reasons, the content and the goals of education, a distinction has to be made between different types of attitudes towards education.

Mostly, research on attitudes towards education reveals two broad sets of educational attitudes. These attitudes are called traditional or content-centered on the one hand, and progressive or student-centered on the other hand (Bunting, 1985; Silvernail, 1992). For the distinction of these two sets of attitudes, most of the research refers to Dewey (1902/1956), who is seen as the founding father of progressive education (Cremin, 1961).

People who hold strong traditional or content-centered attitudes are said to emphasize order and discipline at school, a focus on the core subjects, achievements, and the attainment of the highest diploma possible. There is a strong accent on the product of education.
People who hold strong student-centered attitudes are said to emphasize active participation of students within the classroom and the school, a focus on social and creative subjects, and cooperative ways of learning. There is a strong accent on the educational process.

Taken these different attitudes towards education into account, parents may differ with respect to their attitudes when they choose a school for its 'high quality'. Some parents may choose a

high quality school in terms of high learning outcomes, whereas other parents may choose a high quality school in terms of their student-centeredness.

When parents choose a school for their child, it may be said that they seek a match between family habitus and school habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore it can be expected that parents who have strong content-centered attitudes, may emphasize high learning outcomes of students to be a relevant reason for choosing a school, contrarily to parents with strong student-centered attitudes towards education, who may emphasize personal and social development as important reasons for choosing a school.

Class-related reasons for school choice

The reasons to choose a school for their child appear to be strongly related to social-structural characteristics of the parents. An important contribution to the issue of school choice and class has been made by Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz (1996; see also Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). They found that choice is directly and powerfully related to school choice. Their analysis of interviews with 137 parents led to a distinction into three ideal-types of school choosers, which have been named 'privileged/skilled', 'semi-skilled', and 'disconnected'. The term skill refers to the cultural capacities parents possess to operate in the educational market (cf. Bourdieu, 1987). According to Coleman, it can also be said that the skill o choose a school might refer to the social capital parents possess, for active choosers have access to information of school to make a comparison with respect to school characteristics they find important for choosing. Having access to this kind of information can be perceived of as a kind of social capital (Coleman, 1988).

Parents of the three types of choosers reported different reasons for choosing a school. The privileged/skilled choosers strongly prefer a school that suits the particular interest and personality of their child. Depending on their specific attitudes towards education, they may prefer schools with high standards of academic achievements (content-centered parents), or they may prefer schools with a strong emphasis on social education (student-centered attitudes). Semi-skilled choosers prefer

'good' schools. Their choice is strongly based on the school's reputation. Disconnected choosers, finally, mostly choose a school that is in close physical proximity to their home and part of the social community (Ball et al., 1996). When social classes of parents are taken into account '...almost without exception the disconnected choosers are working class; the privileged/skilled choosers are almost exclusively professional, middle class; ... the semi-skilled choosers tend to be from a variety of class backgrounds.' (Ball et al., 1996, p. 92).

Other research also has shown that reasons for school choice are class-related (Echols & Wilms, 1995; Van der Kley & Felling, 1989). Findings of these researches are quite similar: working-class parents tend to choose schools for its physical proximity, whereas professional, middle-class parents tend to choose a school that fits their child's interest and personality best. It therefore can be expected that professional, middle-class parents rate educational or ideological reasons for school choice higher than lower class parents.

Differences between systems of choice

In addition, this paper will address the issue of systemic influences on parents' reasons for school choice. Therefore, a comparison of reasons for school choice of parents in the Netherlands and in Finland will be made. A comparison of reasons for school choice of parents from these two countries can be very interesting, because the Netherlands has an educational system in which school choice is totally free. Each Dutch parent has to choose a school for his child; there is no assignment of schools (see Dronkers, 1995). In Finland (like in most of the western countries), freedom of choice is limited. Limited school choice in Finland has been made possible since 1998 (Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 1999). Finnish children are assigned to the nearest school. If justified, parents are allowed to deviate from the assigned school. To be able to choose a school, parents have to send a written application to the local authority.

These differences between two countries can be of relevance for reasons of school choice parents possess and the extent to which they actually, actively choose a school for their child.

Finnish parents who tend to hold physical proximity as a leading reason for school choice do not have to choose a school, since their children will visit the assigned local school. This, however, does not mean that Finnish parents who do not apply for a non-local school will actually hold physical proximity as a leading reason for school choice.

Finnish research shows that from the parents choosing not their nearest school, 35 percent were from upper-level employee, while 10 percent were from working class (Rinne, 1999). This finding seems a confirmation of the idea, that professional middle-class parents a more likely to be active choosers than lower class parents are.

In this paper we will address differences in reasons for school choice and attitudes towards education between the Netherlands and Finland, as well as the extent to which the class-relatedness of reasons of school choice is the same for both countries.

Research questions

In all, the following research questions can be formulated:

1. What reasons for school choice do people have?
2. How strong are these reasons related to educational attitudes?
3. How strong are these reasons related to social background characteristics?
4. what differences exist in reasons for school choice between the Netherlands and Finland?

Method

Samples

This research is based on two sets of data, a Dutch one and a Finnish one. The Dutch research is finished and published in 1999. The Finnish data is collected in the winter 1999 by using the same questionnaires as in the Netherlands. The data sets of both countries are thus exactly identical which provides us with the opportunity to make international comparison.

The Dutch sample

For the data collection in The Netherlands, a sample has been taken of the inhabitants

between 18 and 70 years old of a sample of municipalities (Eisinga et al., 1999). This sample existed of 1001 persons. The sample is drawn on behalf of a large national survey called 'Social Cultural Developments in the Netherlands' (SOCON). This SOCON-research has been executed by researches of the social sciences faculty of the university of Nijmegen.

The Finish sample

To collect the Finnish data we sent questionnaires to 800 Finnish people in the cities Lahti, Kuopio and Turku. They were parents of children of approximately 12 years old, who had to make a school choice for their secondary school. The respondents were randomly selected from addresses-lists acquired by the three municipality offices. Of 800 people, 395 returned the questionnaire.

In order to create two comparable sets of data, pairs of Dutch en Finnish respondents were created by matching respondents with respect to three characteristics: (1) age, (2) level of education, and (3) social class. The level of education was measured by asking the respondents what their highest completed education was. Social class was measured by asking the occupation of the respondents. The social class-level was assessed according to Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarrero (1983).

The matching procedure resulted in 244 matched pairs. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the Dutch and Finnish samples.

Table 1: Social background characteristics of the Dutch and Finnish samples

Level of education			*Social class*		
	f	%		f	%
Lower education	21	8.6	Higher professional	33	14.5
Lower secondary school	44	18.0	Lower professional	51	22.4
O-levels; A-levels	34	13.9	Non-manual worker	61	26.8
Secondary vocational	32	13.1	Owner of small	22	9.6
school	92	37.7	business	8	3.5
College	21	8.6	Supervisor	53	23.2
University			Manual worker		
Total	244	100	Total	228	100

The mean age of both the samples was 42.8 years, with a standard deviation of 7.5 years.

Measures

Reasons for school choice

Respondents were asked to rate the following six reasons for school choice:

- School has to emphasize achievements
- School must pay attention to social education
- School must pay attention to creative development
- School has to be within easy reach
- School has to have the same religious values
- School has to have the same child-rearing attitudes

The respondents could rate these reasons by means of a 5-point-scale

(1=don't agree at all, 2= don't agree, 3= don't agree, don't disagree, 4= agree, 5=agree entirely).

Attitudes towards education

For the operationalization of attitudes towards education, three domains of content were distinguished: (1) educational goals, (2) pedagogical relation, and (3) instructional emphases. For each domain, five-point Likert-statements were formulated.

A list of 73 items was constructed to measure educational attitudes on abovementioned three domains of content.

Regarding *goals of education*, items were formulated to measure attitudes towards career-development, personal development and social development.

Regarding the *pedagogical relation* between teachers and students, items were formulated to measure people's attitudes regarding a strictly organized classroom, in which order and discipline are the key concepts, and items regarding democracy in education, with students having a say in teaching methods and the content of education.

At last, items were formulated regarding *instructional emphases* in education. Those items refer to attitudes towards the basics (the three R's), personal and social subjects, academic performance, and an emphasis on self-directed and cooperative learning.

For the Dutch research, the questionnaire was presented in Dutch; for the Finnish part of the research, the questionnaire was presented in Finnish.

Results

For each of the six reasons of school choice, mean scores and standard deviations are computed. These figures are presented in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of reasons of school choice in The Netherlands and Finland

What do you think is important for choosing a school for your child?	Netherlands			Finland			
	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Diff.
School has to emphasize achievements	2.79	.97	242	2.84	1.14	235	-.03
School must pay attention to social education	3.74	.80	242	4.03	.85	244	-.29*
School must pay attention to creative	3.47	.88	242	3.61	.99	242	-.13
development	3.17	1.09	242	3.28	1.10	242	-.11
School has to be within easy reach	2.49	1.21	242	2.82	1.21	230	-.32*
School has to have the same religious values	3.02	1.07	241	2.98	1.20	240	.05
School has to have the same child-rearing attitudes							

* $p<.05$

Figure 1: Mean scores of reasons for school choice in the Netherlands and Finland

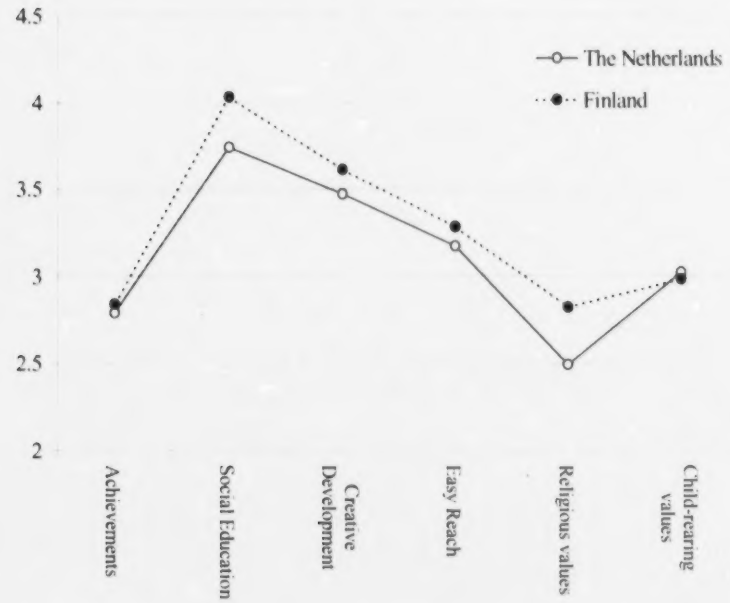

Table 2 and Figure 1 show that parents seem to report social education as the most important reason for choosing s school. Of least importance are an emphasis on achievement of schools and religious values. These results are the same for both countries, though, except for child-rearing values, the mean scores of the Finnish sample are slightly higher (and statistically significant for social education and religious values).

Table 3 shows the intercorrelations of scores for six reasons for school choice of the samples of both countries. The correlations between social education and creative development as well as the correlations between religious values and child rearing values are relatively high. These correlations indicate that social education and creative development both refer to non-basic educational aspects as reasons for school choice, and that religious values and child-rearing values both refer to ideological reasons for choosing a school.

Correlations between achievement and the other reasons are slightly higher in Finland than in the Netherlands.

Table 3: Correlations between reasons for school choice (below diagonal = the Netherlands; above diagonal = Finland, N=244)

	Achievements	Social education	Creative development	Easy reach	Religious values	Child-rearing values
Achievements	1.00	.23	.23	.28	.19	.20
Social education	.07	1.00	.52	.18	.30	.37
Creative development	.04	.58	1.00	.15	.27	.18
Easy reach	.17	.19	.16	1.00	.18	.19
Religious values	.13	.25	.09	.04	1.00	.75
Child-rearing values	.03	.19	.07	.19	.54	1.00

With regard to *attitudes towards education*, factor analyses resulted in two dimensions. These dimensions are labeled content-centeredness and student-centeredness. Content-centered attitudes consist of items referring to career-development as an important educational goal, order and discipline at school and an emphasis on the core subject and high marks. Student-centered attitudes consist of items referring to personal and social development as important educational goals, involvement of students at school, and an emphasis on a broad curriculum and cooperative ways of learning.

For Dutch people, the correlation between both attitudes is .04; for Finnish people, the correlation is .36 ($p<.05$). Content-centered and student-centered attitudes towards education are more related in Finland than they are in the Netherlands.

Descriptive statistics of both educational attitudes are reported in Table 4. As these figures show, parents in both countries seem to value the process-oriented education most, and product-oriented education least.

Parents of both countries also differ in their attitudes towards education. Finnish parents score significantly higher on all attitudes, though differences in content-centered attitudes are higher than differences in student-centered attitudes.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of attitudes towards education in The Netherlands and Finland

Educational Attitude	Netherlands			Finland			
	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Diff.
Content-centeredness	3.46	.53	244	3.89	.49	234	-.43*
Student-centeredness	4.01	.37	244	4.27	.40	234	-.25*

- $p<.05$

To what extent are reasons for school choice related to attitudes towards education? To answer this question, correlations are computed between reasons for school choice and attitudes towards education, separate for of both countries (see Table 5). These correlations show that parents with strong content-centered attitudes tend to prefer schools that emphasize achievements and that parents with strong student-centered attitudes tend to prefer school that stress social education and creative development. For Finnish parents, there is some correlation between content-centered attitudes on the one hand and social education and creative development on the other hand, as well

as between student-centered attitudes and achievements. These correlations may be due to the correlation between both educational attitudes in Finland.

Moreover, in Finland, some correlation exists between both attitudes towards education with child-rearing values. These correlations are fairly low for the Dutch sample.

Table 5: Correlations between reasons for school choice and attitudes towards education in the Netherlands and in Finland

	Achievements		Social education		Creative development		Easy reach		Religious values		Child-rearing values	
	Neth.	Fin.	Neth	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.
Content-centered	.59*	.51*	-.02	.27*	-.11	.15*	.26*	.13*	.16*	.13*	.08	.21*
Student-centered	.03	.21*	.50*	.58*	.40	.48*	.19*	.22*	.13*	.24*	.15*	.30*

To assess the influence of social background on reasons for school choice, differences between mean scores of parents of six levels of education and six social class-levels are tested. Table 6 and Table 7 show mean scores for reasons for school choice for social classes and levels of education in The Netherlands and Finland.

Table 6: Reasons for school choice (mean scores) for social classes in the Netherlands and Finland

	Achievements		Social education		Creative development		Easy reach		Religious values		Child-rearing values	
Social Class												
	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.
Higher	2.97	2.57	3.97	4.27	3.7	4.0	3.0	3.1	2.5	3.46	3.12	3.22
2	2.55	3.04	4.08	4.04	3.6	3.7	3.1	3.1	2.5	2.56	3.16	2.50
3	2.79	2.82	3.77	4.05	3.3	3.6	2.9	3.2	2.5	3.17	2.98	3.26
4	3.05	2.65	3.41	3.60	3.1	3.7	3.6	2.9	2.8	2.10	3.09	2.45
5	3.00	2.71	3.63	4.21	3.3	3.6	2.7	3.6	2.0	2.57	2.88	2.86
lower	2.77	3.26	3.40	3.98	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.5	2.2	2.37	2.87	2.81
$p < .05$			*		*					*		*

Table 7: Reasons for school choice (mean scores) for levels of education in the Netherlands and Finland

	Achievements		Social education		Creative development		Easy reach		Religious values		Child-rearing values	
Level of education												
	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.	Neth.	Fin.
Lower education	3.24	3.10	3.71	3.81	3.2	3.0	3.7	3.7	2.3	2.45	2.67	2.95
2	2.84	2.86	3.39	3.86	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.4	2.5	2.24	2.98	2.55
3	2.59	2.65	3.68	4.11	3.4	3.7	3.3	3.2	2.7	3.19	3.09	3.33
4	2.91	2.91	3.59	3.87	3.3	3.6	3.2	3.3	2.3	2.76	2.97	3.11
5	2.64	2.80	3.92	4.19	3.7	3.7	2.9	3.1	2.4	3.05	3.07	3.02
University	3.05	2.71	4.10	4.21	3.9	3.7	2.9	3.0	2.8	3.26	3.24	3.17
$p<.05$			*		*	*	*			*		

In the Netherlands, social classes differ with respect to social education and creative development. The higher the social class, the more parents tend to stress the importance of these reasons for school choice. In Finland, parents of different social classes differ with respect to the importance of ideological reasons for choosing a school. The higher the social class, the higher parents seem to state that religious values and child-rearing values are important for choosing a school. An exceptional group is the group of lower professional workers. They have rated these reasons as relatively less important.

In The Netherlands, differences between levels of education exist with respect to social education, creative development, and physical proximity as reasons for school choice. The higher the level of education the higher people tend to stress social education and creative development, and the lower people tend to stress the physical proximity of the school.
Finnish parents with different levels of education differ with respect to creative development and religious values. The higher their level of education, the higher they rate the importance of these reasons for school choice.

To test whether the relationship between attitudes towards education and reasons for school choice differs for social groups, interaction effects of educational attitudes and social background characteristics (level of education and social class) on reasons for school choice were conducted. None of these interaction effects was statistically significant, neither for the Dutch sample, nor for the Finnish sample. This means that for Dutch and Finnish parents, though differences exist between social groups with respect to educational attitudes, the influence of educational attitudes on reasons for school choice is the same for each social group.

Discussion

This paper concerns reasons for school choice in the Netherlands and Finland. In this study, it is shown that people hold an emphasis of schools on social education as a leading reason for

choosing a school and that an emphasis on achievements and religious values are seen as the least important reasons for choosing a school.

This finding can be the result of a relatively high degree of student-centered attitudes towards education compared to content-centered attitudes towards education. Consequence of this result might be that in marketing schools, more emphasis can be laid on social aspects of education and less, as is currently the case, on academic achievements.

Reasons for school choice seem to be related to people's attitudes towards education. People with strong content-centered attitudes tend to prefer schools that emphasize achievements, whereas people with strong student-centered attitudes tend to prefer schools that put an emphasis on social education and creative development.

Also, reasons for school choice seem to be related to people's social background. Though, differences between social groups with respect to reasons for school choice differ between the two countries that are compared in this study.

In *the Netherlands*, there seems to be a relation between people's social class and level of education with an emphasis on social education and creative development as reasons for school choice: the higher the social class or the level of education, the more these reasons have been rated as important. People with different levels of education also differ with respect to physical proximity as reason for school choice: the lower the level of education, the higher this reason has been rated as important.

In *Finland*, relations are found between social class and two ideological reasons for school choice: religious values and child-rearing values of the school: the higher the social class, the more these reasons have been rated as important. An exceptional group is the group of lower professional workers. They have rated these reasons as relatively less important. Finnish people with different levels of education differ with respect to creative development and religious values as reasons for

school choice. The highest levels of education tend to rate these reasons as more important than the lowest levels of education.

Finally, it is shown that the influence of educational attitudes on reasons for school choice is the same for each social group. This result holds for the Dutch people, as well as the Finnish one. The findings of this study concerning the differences between both countries regarding the relation between social background and reasons for school choice seem to point more at culture differences between the Netherlands and Finland than at differences of systems of choice between both countries (see Hofstede, 1986).

With regard to market mechanisms in both educational systems, the findings of this study suggest that academic achievement is a relatively weak reason of parents to choose a school for their child. Publication of exam-results in daily newspapers, as is the case in some countries, like the Netherlands, is used to provide information about the quality of schools. These publications serve two major goals. First, by presenting their results, schools compete, which may lead to an emphasis on the quality improvement of education. Second, parents as consumers of education are given a tool to choose the best schools. Publication of exam-results is presumed to be helpful for the choice of parents for a certain school. Research on school choice, though, reveals that these publications only had little effect on the decrease of enrollment numbers of 'poorly performing' schools. With the results of this study, this finding can be confirmed.

Nevertheless, educators and administrators are concerned about segregation between schools, when school choice is totally free. As Karsten (1994) points out, an unequal distribution of minority pupils between schools is possible because of free parental choice (as is the case in The Netherlands). Reason for ethnic segregation must not be sought in different levels of performance between segregated schools, but presumably in the perceived social climate of schools with a high degree of minority students, or even as an act of ethnic discrimination, as Goldhaber (1997) states:

'the racial composition of a school may be an important factor in parental decisions to send their children to private schools. Hence, choice could lead to greater segregation without improving overall educational outcomes.' (p. 144) and 'the competition between schools may be based not just on the quality of a school but also on the racial composition of the student body. This last finding suggests that vouchers might open the door for increased racial segregation in the schools.' (p. 147) These statements are congruent to our finding that social education is a leading reason for school choice of parents.

The existence of segregated schools is increasingly experienced as an educational problem. That is why (1) in The Netherlands, local agencies in Dutch education are attempting to develop policies to counteract ethnic segregation (e.g. Karsten, 1994), and (2) in Finland, free school choice is still limited (see Simola, Rinne, & Kivirauma, 1999).

In conclusion, we state that research on reasons for school choice should pay more attention to social factors influencing school choice than to issues of academic achievements.

References

Ball, S. J., Bowe, R., & Gewirtz, S. (1996). School choice, social class and distinction: the realization of social advantage in education. *Journal of Education Policy, 11*(1), 89-112.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* London: Routledge.

Bunting, C. E. (1985). Dimensionality of teacher educational beliefs: A validation study. *Journal of Experimental Education, 53*(4), 188-192.

Coleman, J.S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94(supplement),* 95-120.

Cremin, L.A. (1961). *The transformation of the school: Progressivism in American education.* New York: Vintage Books.

Dewey, J. (1902/1956). *The child and the curriculum and The school and society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dronkers, J. (1995). The existence of parental choice in the Netherlands. *Educational Policy, 9*(3), 227-243.

Echols, F., H. & Wilms, J. D. (1995). Reasons for chool choice in Schotland. *Journal of Education Policy, 10*(2), 143-156.

Eisinga, R., Felling, A., Konig, R, Peters, J., & Scheepers, P. (1999). *Religion in Dutch Society 95: Documentation of a National Survey on Religious and Secular Attitudes in 1995.* Amsterdam: NIWI.

Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. J., & Bowe, R. (1995). *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Goldhaber, D. D. (1997). School choice as educational reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 79*(2), 143-147.

Hammond, T. & Dennison, B. (1995). School choice in less populated areas. *Educational Mangement and Administration, 23*(2), 104-113.

Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10*(3), 193-221.

Hughes, M., Wikeley, F., & Nash, T, (1994). *Parents and their Children's Schools.* Oxford: Blackwell

Hunter, J. B. (1991). Which school? A study of parents' choice of secondary school. *Educational Research, 33*(1), 31-41.

Karsten, S. (1994). Policy on ethnic segregation in a system of choice: The case of the netherlands. *Journal of Education Policy, 9*(3), 211-225.

Kley P. van der & Felling, A. (1989). Onderwijs en Subculturele Oriëntaties. In P. Vogels (Ed.). *De School: Keuzen en Kansen.* pp. 39-59. Muiderberg: Coutinho.

Morgan, V., Dunn, S., Cairns, E., & Fraser, G. (1993). How do parents choose a school for their child? An example of the exercise of parental choice. *Educational Research, 35*(2), 139-148.

Silvernail, D. L. (1992). The development and factor structure of the educational beliefs questionnaire. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 52,* 663-667.

Simola, H., Rinne, R., Kivirauma, J. (1999). Finland: National changes in education and educational governance. In S. Lindblad & T. S. Popkewitz (Eds.). *Education governance and social integration and exclusion: National cases of educational systems and recent reforms (Upsala Reports on Education, 34, pp. 42-64).* Upsale: Department of Education.

Woods, Ph. A., Bagley, C., & Glatter, R. (1998). *School Choice and Competition: Markets in the Public Interest?* London: Routledge.